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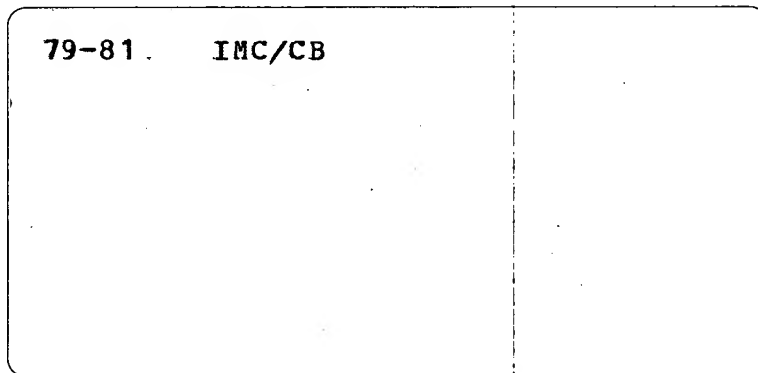
Afghanistan Situation Report



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5 February 1985

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AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT

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[] the Soviets have limited their use of MI-24 helicopter gunships in the Panjsher Valley because of its vulnerability to guerrilla air defenses. []

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SOVIET COLUMN ATTACKED

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The Afghan insurgents inflicted heavy losses on a Soviet unit in Baghlan Province in early January. []

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SOVIETS PROTEST CHINA'S AID TO THE RESISTANCE

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Moscow's propaganda attacks on Chinese policy are intended to press Beijing to reduce its support for the Afghan resistance. []

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The position of the Afghan regime in Balkh Province has improved slightly since 1981, but Kabul still controls much less territory than it did at the time of the Soviet invasion. []

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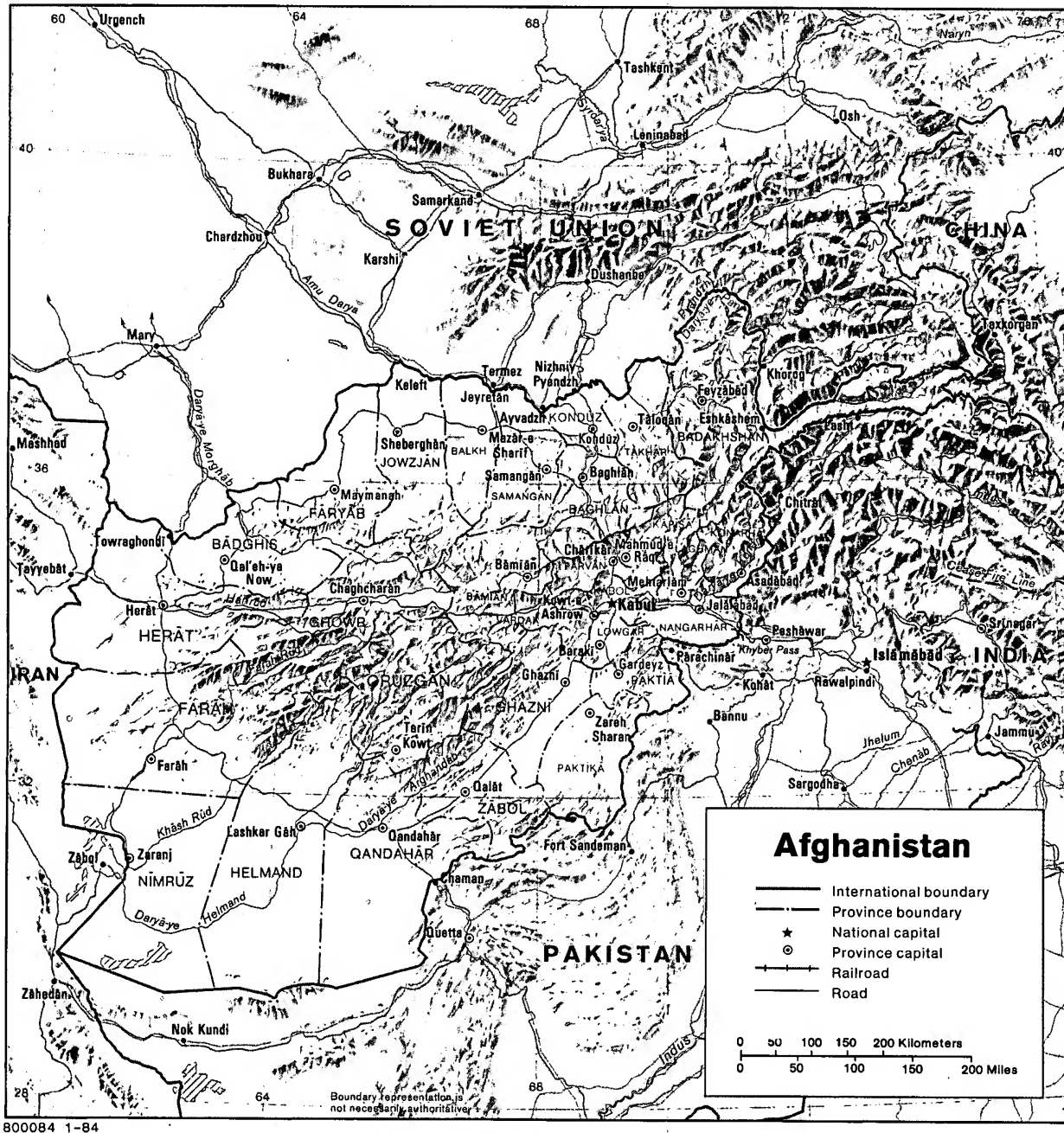
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MI-24 USE IN PANJSHER LIMITED

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[redacted] the Soviets have not used MI-24 helicopter gunships to attack targets in the Panjsher Valley since last spring. [redacted] the Soviets decided the MI-24s were too vulnerable to insurgent antiaircraft weapons after, [redacted] 30 were shot down during the Panjsher campaign. The Soviets now are relying on fixed-wing aircraft for airstrikes in the Panjsher Valley and are using helicopters only for troop transport and resupply missions. [redacted]

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Comment: Helicopters are particularly vulnerable to insurgent heavy machinegun fire from mountainside positions when the helicopters operate in narrow valleys--such as the middle and upper portion of the Panjsher and its many side valleys. The Soviets are making greater use of SU-17 fighter-bombers and SU-25 attack planes in airstrikes throughout northeastern Afghanistan. Although the Soviets probably have limited the use of helicopters in the Panjsher and other valleys, [redacted]

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[redacted] helicopter gunships continue to provide close air support for ground force operations. [redacted]

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SOVIET COLUMN ATTACKED

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[redacted] insurgents inflicted heavy losses in an attack on a Soviet traffic control brigade early last month in Baghlan Province. The insurgents set five vehicles on fire, trapping the rest of the column. [redacted]

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Comment: The Soviets have too few helicopters in Afghanistan to meet unexpected contingencies. Although the Soviet and Afghan presence in the Panjsher Valley has reduced insurgent attacks against convoys along the main road between Kabul and the USSR, the Baghlan attack shows that the guerrillas are still capable of staging major assaults in the area. [redacted]

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SOVIETS PROTEST CHINA'S AID TO THE RESISTANCE [REDACTED]

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Both Moscow and Kabul have publicized the formal protest that the Afghan Foreign Ministry made to Beijing on 31 January regarding an alleged recent increase in Chinese support for the Afghan resistance. The Kabul regime also publicized the text of a letter from the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan to the Chinese Communist Party attacking China on the same grounds. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The latest issue of the Soviet periodical, Problems of the Far East, published prior to First Deputy Premier Arkhipov's visit to China, contained a strong Soviet attack on Chinese support for the resistance, and on 24 January Izvestia rebutted a recent Chinese propaganda attack on Soviet policy by accusing China of following the American line on Afghanistan. [REDACTED]

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Comment: The propaganda suggests Moscow intends to press China on this issue. Despite the steady growth in Chinese aid to the Afghan guerrillas over the past five years, Soviet propaganda attacks on China up to now have not been nearly as frequent as those leveled against the US and Pakistan. Moreover, Soviet attacks have generally coincided with ups and downs in Sino-Soviet relations rather than the situation in Afghanistan. For example, the recent Izvestia article probably was a result of Moscow's annoyance over Beijing's willingness to resume anti-Soviet propaganda since first Deputy Premier Arkhipov's trip to Beijing in December. [REDACTED]

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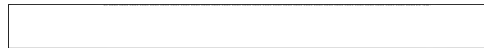
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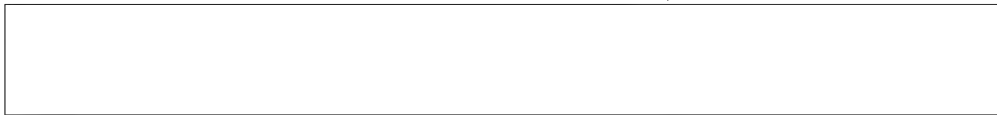
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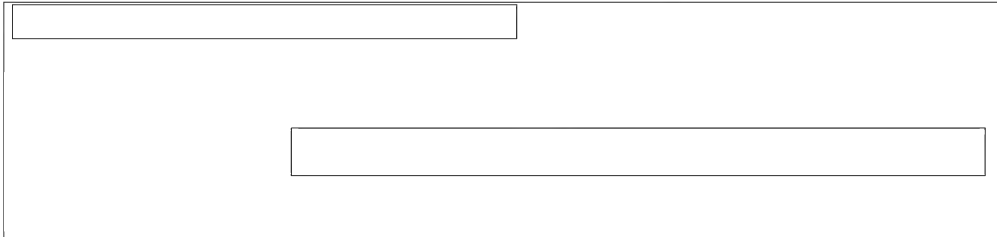
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**PERSPECTIVE
THE WAR IN BALKH 1978-1984***

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Military operations in Balkh Province have been concentrated in a belt approximately 30 kilometers wide that includes Mazar-e Sharif, the provincial capital, its airfields, an important east-west highway running through the center of the province and insurgent bases in the mountains to the south. The position of the government has improved only slightly since early 1981, and Kabul still controls much less territory than it did at the time of the Soviet invasion.

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1978-1980--Mainly Peaceful

Neither the Communist coup in 1978 nor the Soviet invasion the following year sparked strong resistance in Balkh. Mazar-e Sharif, the country's fourth largest city, did not experience insurgent activity comparable to other Afghan cities. Mazari, for example, staged only a largely non-violent one-day protest in February 1980, while Kabulis were engaged in more than a week of violent demonstrations. For most of 1980, security forces and insurgents clashed only infrequently in the countryside, and we know of only two Soviet sweep operations in the province before December--near Mazar-e Sharif in June and in the southern part of the province in May. By December, however, incidents in the countryside were increasing and insurgent pressure on Mazar-e Sharif became serious enough for the Soviets to stage the first of several operations designed to drive insurgents from the Marmol Valley in mountains south of the city.

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Early 1981--Insurgent Gains

The resistance made significant gains in early 1981. The Afghan 18th Division, having reinforced units in Faryab Province to deal with an insurgent threat, had no combat troops to turn back an insurgent raid on Mazar-e Sharif. By April the insurgents had

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*This is the first in a series examining the war in detail in several provinces. The study is based on approximately 500 reports of incidents in the province acquired from [redacted] insurgent sources. [redacted]

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achieved, with little fighting in Balkh, the elimination of the government presence in almost all of the mountainous southern half of the province. [REDACTED]

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1981-1983--Ups and Downs for Both Sides

Fighting in northern Balkh during most of the next three years was characterized by cycles of Soviet and Afghan government sweep operations that resulted in a marked decline in resistance activity. With increasing arms holdings and improved organization, the insurgents became more active in early 1983. Efforts to improve cooperation were spearheaded by the province's most influential Jamiat commander, Zabiullah Khan, who was often able to establish working relations with the moderate-backed Harakat-i-Inqilab and the Shi'ite Nasr organization.* As usual, insurgent attacks concentrated on the east-west road, Mazar-e Sharif, and the airfields. The insurgents temporarily seized a district capital west of Mazar in November. [REDACTED]

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The only Soviet or government military effort reported in the southern third of the province between early 1981 and the summer of 1984 occurred on 1 February 1983 with a raid on a southern base to rescue Soviet civilians who had been captured in Mazar-e Sharif in January. [REDACTED]

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The Balkh River Valley in the mountains southwest of Mazar-e Sharif has been the only other area with significant military activity. Despite insurgent gains in the south in the winter and spring of 1981, the government maintained tenuous control of parts of the valley. Available reporting suggests that government forces have tried to do little more than hold their posts--we know of only three small sweep operations in four years. The government apparently relies on heavy air attacks to deter the insurgents. [REDACTED]

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1984--Slight Soviet Gain

The establishment, in January 1984, of permanent Soviet posts in the Marmol Valley was presumably responsible for a lower level of insurgent activity during the remainder of the year. In Mazar-e Sharif sabotage became, for the first time, more common than

For more information, see the Perspective, "Zabiullah Khan Profiled." in the 4 December 1984 Afghanistan Situation Report. [REDACTED]

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insurgent raids. During the summer, for the first time in nearly four years, the Soviets staged a few air strikes against insurgent bases in the southern part of the province. [REDACTED]

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Lessons

There are some obvious differences in the fighting in Balkh and in other provinces, especially those along the Pakistani border where there has been greater military activity. Soviet involvement in Balkh has been relatively low--most air and ground operations have involved only Afghan Government forces. The resistance has been more poorly armed in Balkh than in eastern Afghanistan, primarily because of Balkh's greater distance from Pakistan and Iran. Historically, the people of Balkh have not been as rebellious or warlike as those of most other provinces. [REDACTED]

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Nevertheless, in our view, some aspects of the war in Balkh apply to other areas as well:

- The Soviets are willing to countenance insurgent control of remote areas and a low level of insurgent activity. In Balkh they have made no effort to gain control of the southern part of the province, and have staged sweep operations only when the insurgency was active. They usually have not tried to follow up sweep operations by establishing new posts. Once the establishment of posts in the Marmol Valley reduced the insurgency in Mazar-e Sharif to an apparently tolerable level, they made no effort to block other insurgent infiltration routes or occupy other base areas.
- Sweep operations reduce insurgent activity for a few months at most. At least in Balkh, establishing new posts appears to have a lasting impact. There was a lasting reduction of insurgent activity in Mazar-e Sharif only after the Soviets established posts in the Marmol Valley in January 1984. The deeper penetration by a larger force in March 1983 brought only about two months' respite.
- Terrain is critical in determining insurgent activity. Insurgents have been able to do little in the flat, open northern third of the province; only about 5 percent of the reported incidents occurred in this area. In central Balkh, [REDACTED] most resistance activity on the plains was staged from mountain bases.

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The Soviets have improved their position marginally in Balkh since 1981, primarily in reducing the level of insurgency in Mazar-e Sharif. In our view, however, unless the Soviets are willing to commit substantially greater resources to the province, they will make little progress in Balkh in coming years.

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